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# Centrifugal Instability over a Rotating Cone

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## Abstract

In this study, we provide a mathematical description of the onset of counter-rotating circular vortices observed for a family of slender rotating cones (of half-angles 15°, 30° and 45°) in quiescent fluid. In particular, we apply appropriate scalings and apply a change of coordinates, accounting for the effects of streamline curvature. A combined large Reynolds number and large vortex wavenumber analysis is used to obtain an estimate for the asymptotic right-hand branch of neutral stability for the family of slender rotating cones. Existing experimental and theoretical studies are discussed which lead to the clear hypothesis of a hitherto unidentified convective instability mode that dominates within the boundary-layer flow over slender rotating cones. The mode manifests as Görtler-type counter-rotating spiral vortices, indicative of a centrifugal mechanism. Although a formulation consistent with the classic rotating-disk problem has been successful in predicting the stability characteristics over broad cones, it is unable to identify such a centrifugal mode as the half-angle is reduced. An alternative formulation is developed and the governing equations solved using both short-wavelength asymptotic and numerical approaches to independently identify the centrifugal mode. Our results confirm our earlier predictions pertaining to the existence of the new Görtler mode and capture the effects of the governing centrifugal instability mechanism. Meanwhile, favourable comparisons are drawn between numerical and asymptotic neutral stability curve predictions.

## Introduction

This paper describes recent advances in the study of boundary-layer transition over rotating cones. In particular, we are concerned with the distinct convective instability mechanisms that dominate within the boundary layers over slender and broad rotating cones. Our interest in rotating cones is motivated by the flow around nose cones in aeroengine and spinning projectile applications. Here laminar–turbulent transition within the boundary layer can lead to significant increases in drag which has negative implications for fuel efficiency and control. Alternatively, turbulent flow can be encouraged as a means of heat transfer in situations where unwanted heat is generated, for example in re-entry. In any event, a complete understanding of the transition of such flows could lead to modifications in design and significant cost savings in aerospace technologies. It is clear that the linear-stability analyses presented here for cones rotating within incompressible and otherwise still fluids are of limited direct relevance in terms of these motivating applications. However, previous studies including [3, 5, 6] have shown that there is a close link between the rotating disk and cone problems in still fluid and axial flow. Hence, the current still fluid study forms an important stepping stone to analysing the more complex problem where axial flow is introduced. More generally,

this work should be considered as a further step towards fully classifying the instability mechanics within the global class of boundary layer flows over rotating bodies. Indeed, studies of the effects of enforced axial flow over broad cones and disks have already been published, [1, 3, 5, 6].

## Formulation

We use coordinate axes aligned with the spiral vortices and with origin  $O'$  placed at the local position of the analysis. As shown in figure 1, the  $\hat{x}^*$ -axis coincides with the direction of propagation of the spiral vortices aligned with the effective velocity direction. Alternatively, the  $y^*$ - and  $z^*$ -axes are mutually orthogonal and run in the tangential and surface-normal directions, respectively (where a  $*$  denotes a dimensional quantity in all that follows). The resulting coordinate system  $(\hat{x}^*, y^*, z^*)$  rotates with the cone surface at constant angular frequency  $\Omega^*$ . Importantly, the logarithmic spirals are directed such that the  $y^*$ -axis has a positive projection with respect to the direction of rotation of the cone. This requires that the  $\hat{x}^*$ -axis has positive projection onto the axis of rotation and the  $y^*$ -axis to have negative projection. The spiral vortices are orientated at an angle  $\phi$  relative to the circle formed from the planar cross-sectional normal to the axis of rotation of the cone.

The governing dimensional Navier–Stokes equations are then derived in this co-ordinate system with appropriate scale factors. We non-dimensionalise lengths on a characteristic distance along the cone  $l^*$ , so that  $\hat{x}^* = l^* \hat{x}$  and  $y^* = l^* y$ . Furthermore, we scale both logarithmic coordinates  $\hat{x}$  and  $y$ , as well as the normal coordinate  $z^*$ , on the boundary-layer thickness, leading to the scaled coordinate system  $(\tilde{x}, \tilde{y}, \eta) = R^{1/2}(\hat{x}, y, z)$  where  $R$  is the Reynolds number. This scaling enables the vortex structure in both logarithmic directions to be analyzed at the same order as the length scale in the surface-normal direction, which is another important difference from our previous formulation in [2]. We assume that the spiral waves are periodic in the effective velocity direction and introduce periodicity into the perturbation quantities of vortex  $\tilde{x}$ -wavenumber  $a$  and  $\tilde{y}$ -wavenumber  $b$ . Scaling our perturbing quantities on the boundary-layer thickness, we introduce a perturbed flow of the form

$$\begin{aligned} \tilde{\mathbf{u}}^* &= \Omega^* l^* \sin \psi [\{x \tilde{U}(\eta; \phi), x \tilde{V}(\eta; \phi), R^{-1/2} W\} \\ &+ R^{-1/2} \{\tilde{u}(\eta), \tilde{v}(\eta), \tilde{w}(\eta)\} \exp(ia\tilde{x} + ib\tilde{y})]. \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

where  $x$  is streamwise direction over the cone, scaled on  $l^*$  (see [2], for example). We note that these scalings remove  $\psi$  from the governing equations.

Full details of the mathematical derivation of the governing perturbation equations are given in [5] and we arrive at the governing stability equations stated in §5.2.1 [5]. We note that the governing equations are considerably more complicated than those



$\psi$	$\phi$	$Re_c$	$\alpha_{1,c}$
$15^\circ$	$0^\circ$	50	1.01
$30^\circ$	$2.7^\circ$	135	0.72
$45^\circ$	$8.5^\circ$	270	0.59

Table 2. Numerical calculations of the critical Reynolds numbers,  $Re_c$ , and critical vortex wavenumbers,  $\alpha_{1,c}$ , in the effective velocity direction for a range of small half-angle cones and corresponding vortex wavelengths.

$$-Re \left( \alpha_1 \frac{\partial^2 \tilde{U}}{\partial \eta^2} + \beta_1 \frac{\partial^2 \tilde{V}}{\partial \eta^2} \right) \tilde{w} = 0 \quad (4)$$

where

$$\alpha_1 = \frac{a \sin \psi}{Re}, \quad \beta_1 = b \sin \psi, \quad k = \sqrt{\alpha_1^2 + \beta_1^2}, \quad (5)$$

and  $Re = x \sin \psi$  is the local Reynolds number, interpreted as the local non-dimensional radius of the cone surface from the axis of rotation. We relate this rotational Reynolds number,  $Re$ , to the conventional Reynolds number,  $R$ , using equation (8) of [8] to re-write the surface-curvature term, leading to

$$Re = R^{\frac{1}{2}} \sqrt{1.616}. \quad (6)$$

We solve the governing fourth-order perturbation equation (4) by employing an existing OS solver routine for the rotating cone, which has been modified to allow existing solutions for the OS neutral curve at specific values of  $\psi$  to be used in order to enable fast convergence when searching for neutral curves for the required values of  $\psi$  for slender cones. Numerical predictions of the critical Reynolds numbers and critical vortex wavenumbers for  $\psi = 15^\circ, 30^\circ$  and  $45^\circ$  are shown in table 2. The results illustrate a decrease in the half-angle leads to a reduction in the critical Reynolds number, implying slender rotating cones represent the most unstable flow cases and cones of  $\psi \leq 15^\circ$  harbour the most dangerous modes. This is corroborated by the critical vortex wavenumbers in the effective velocity direction, which increase for smaller values of  $\psi$ . Furthermore, while the results recover the findings of [8], importantly, at large Reynolds numbers and large vortex wavenumbers, we observe qualitative agreement with our asymptotic results.

### Comparisons

Numerical analysis of the OS equation yields qualitatively correct predictions of the neutral stability curves, which increase in numerical accuracy as  $Re \rightarrow \infty$  (see, for example, [3] for broad rotating cones). Hence, the OS results should recover the large vortex wavenumber asymptotics at high Reynolds number. Appropriate scalings are used, following [5] so that the Taylor number defined in equation (2) is linearly related to the rotational Reynolds number (see also [8]), leading to a relationship of the form

$$Re = \tilde{T} \sqrt{1.616} \quad (7)$$

for larger Reynolds number,  $Re$ , and large Taylor number,  $T$ . This such that increased  $\tilde{T}$  corresponds to reduced half-angle (for fixed  $\phi$ ). Comparisons with the Reynolds number  $Re$  predicted by the OS analysis against vortex wavenumber are shown in figures 2, 3 and 4 for  $\psi = 15^\circ, 30^\circ$  and  $45^\circ$ , respectively. In each figure, we have computed asymptotic curves for  $\phi = 0^\circ, 2.7^\circ$  and  $8.5^\circ$ , respectively, in order to compare with the most suitable basic flows from the OS analysis. These correspond to the theoretical values of  $\phi$  presented in [8] and hence facilitate comparison with their results, as shown in [7] for  $\psi = 15^\circ$ . We observe good qualitative agreement between the OS neutral curves and the asymptotic branches of the scaled

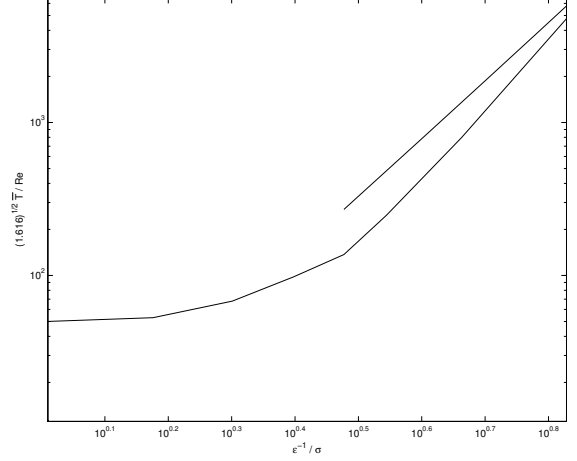


Figure 2. A comparison between the scaled effective asymptotic Taylor number  $\tilde{T}$  (above) and the Reynolds number  $Re$  predicted by the OS analysis (below), against vortex wavenumbers  $\epsilon^{-1}$  and  $\sigma$  respectively, for  $\psi = 15^\circ, \phi = 0^\circ$ .

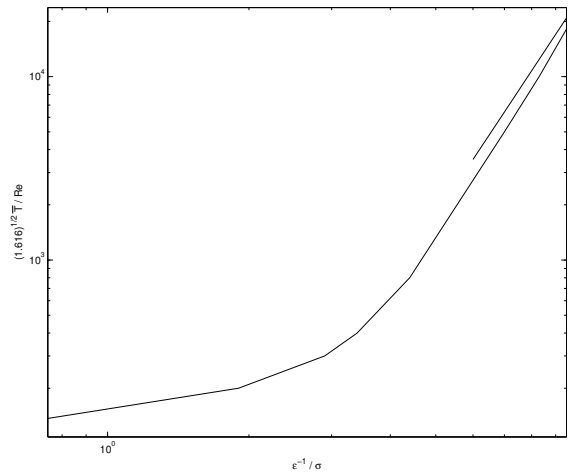


Figure 3. A comparison between the scaled effective asymptotic Taylor number  $\tilde{T}$  (above) and the Reynolds number  $Re$  predicted by the OS analysis (below), against vortex wavenumbers  $\epsilon^{-1}$  and  $\sigma$  respectively, for  $\psi = 30^\circ, \phi = 2.7^\circ$ .

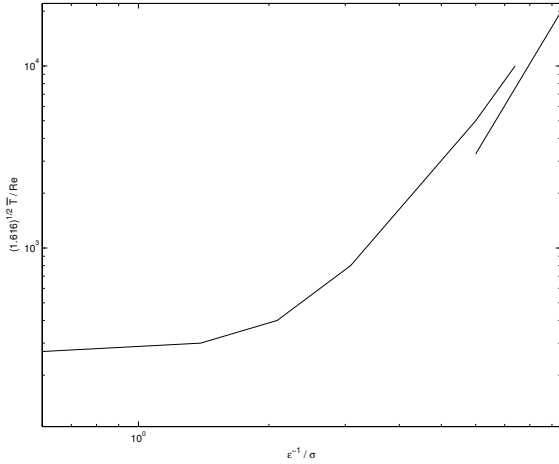


Figure 4. A comparison between the scaled effective asymptotic Taylor number  $\bar{T}$  (below) and the Reynolds number  $Re$  predicted by the OS analysis (above), against vortex wavenumbers  $\varepsilon^{-1}$  and  $\sigma$  respectively, for  $\psi = 45^\circ, \phi = 8.5^\circ$ .

effective Taylor number for  $\psi = 15^\circ, 30^\circ$  and  $45^\circ$ . However, in particular, we notice that as  $\psi$  increases, the agreement between the asymptotics and numerics becomes more favourable for larger values of  $\bar{T}$ , further along the asymptotic branch, which is seen moving from figures 2 to 4.

### Conclusions

In this paper we have motivated the hypothesis of a centrifugal-instability mode within the general class of rotating-cone boundary-layer flows. An alternative formulation that focuses on centrifugal effects has been developed and independent asymptotic and numerical analyses conducted to verify the existence of such a mode. The asymptotic analysis was used to identify the centrifugal mode, yielding an indication of the range of unstable wavenumbers against half-angle for large Reynolds numbers and large vortex wavenumbers. Meanwhile, the OS numerical analysis presented confirms existence of the centrifugal mode and reveals a reduction in the critical Reynolds number as well as an increase in the amplification rate with reduced half-angle, suggesting smaller values of  $\psi$  are destabilizing. Hence, for flow over a spinning cone surface with a relatively small half-angle, the centrifugal-instability mode may be interpreted physically as the most dangerous.

In conclusion, figure 5 shows a more complete view of the dependence of the vortex waveangle on  $\psi$ . A major finding of both the numerical and asymptotic studies in this parameter regime is that the centrifugal modes compare well with the experiments of [8], correcting the region where the crossflow instability theory presented in [2] was insufficient. Finally, while both the current study and [2] consider rotating cones in still fluid, the question of how introducing external parameters, such as an enforced axial flow, affects the interplay between the dominant instability modes remains. The crossflow instability for broader rotating cones in axial flow has been considered and discussed in [3]. Meanwhile, an investigation into the centrifugal instability for slender rotating cones within an imposed axial flow is ongoing and we shall report on this in the near future.

### Acknowledgments

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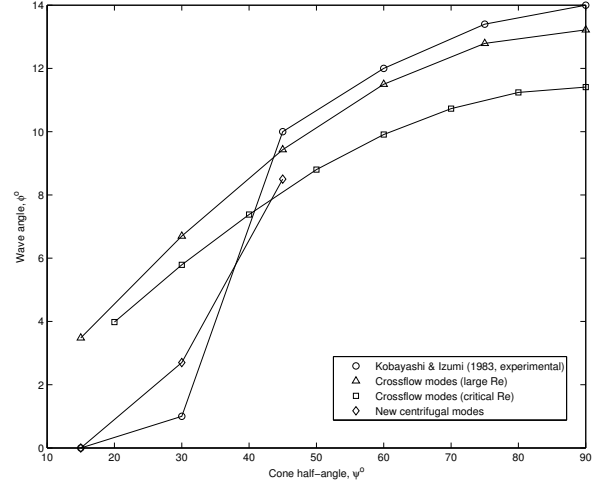


Figure 5. A comparison between experimental observations and theoretical predictions of the vortex orientation angle at the onset of instability, updated from [2]. The diagram illustrates the competing nature of the type I (crossflow) instability versus the new (centrifugal) instability modes, which dominate for slender half-angles and compare well with the experimental measurements in this regime.

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